

It's been a while since I've shared a racism article, but at times, some news event is so fascinating that it needs to be passed on. Whether we agree or disagree with the action this church recently took, I hope it causes us to reflect on the role of the church in relating to the broader history of racism. Today we as followers of Jesus simply need better examples. And I think this article has some helpful theology in its logic and love.

And please also read the second article – which is closer to home. And since that article was written we have heard of more residential school graves – over three times as many in the second article. Even though we were not part of this history, we still are part of the church and the country who mistreated our neighbors.

So please “hear” what is being written in both these articles. Reflect on, not argue with the messages the first time you read them.

And also, for a while, Protestants have been pointing fingers at Catholics. But way too many Protestant leaders in the recent past – have been revealed as greedy, dishonest, lust filled, abusive, and power driven. So we don't have any reason to point our fingers too hard. Simply put, let's call evil – evil. Doesn't matter who did it – it's still affects the future of the church, its witness, and all of us. So keep praying for healing for people, take care of our own lives and go for the “more” the Apostle Paul keeps urging us to seek out in his letters, including Colossians.

Calling Reparations Biblical, Tulsa-Area Church Gives \$200K Each to Massacre Survivors

By **Stephanie Martin** - June 24, 2021 From ChurchLeaders.com



During its worship service last Sunday, Transformation Church in Bixby, Okla., blessed several community members with financial gifts. The [megachurch](#) near Tulsa, which has made large [donations](#) in the past, gave away \$1 million on the Juneteenth weekend, including \$200,000 to each of the three remaining survivors of the [Tulsa Race Massacre](#).

Pastor [Michael Todd](#) spoke about reparations, encouraging churches and pastors to take the lead in creating societal change.

Transformation Church: ‘God Brings Beauty From Ashes’

While addressing his congregation, Todd didn’t shy away from the controversial topic of financially compensating people who’ve been wronged. He said [reparations](#) “is not a political word” but a biblical concept of “repairing something that was destroyed.” God will bring about reparations, the pastor said, just as he promises to “restore to you the years that the locust have eaten” ([Joel 2:25](#)) and to bring beauty from ashes ([Isaiah 61:3](#)).

In 1921, the Tulsa Race Massacre resulted in hundreds of deaths and the destruction of the mostly Black Greenwood neighborhood, known as Black Wall Street. Although it’s one of America’s worst cases of race-related violence, the massacre had—until recently—been absent from many history books. Pastor Todd noted that because “reparations is not coming from them,” meaning the U.S. government, he had instructed church staff to locate remaining survivors and to pinpoint Tulsa’s average home price.

On Sunday, the three living survivors, whose ages range from 100 to 107, attended worship at Transformation, where they heard words of thanks and each received a check for \$200,000. “Thank you for living a life that survived the devastation,” Pastor Todd told them. “I’m a young Black man who took over a [church](#) from a white man who built it in North Tulsa. That couldn’t have happened if you all didn’t survive. Today, we can’t restore everything that has been stolen from you. But today we can put a seed in the ground.”

Transformation Church also presented money to several local organizations, including a grocer who provides fresh produce in an area that had become a [food desert](#).

Transformation: Change Starts in the Church

At Transformation Church, the theme for Sunday’s celebration was “Devastation 2 Restoration.” Pastor Todd said, “If God is the God of [reparation](#) and restoration, and I am...one of God’s people, then I am responsible for being a part of restoring what has been torn down.” That applies to all churches and [church leaders](#), he

said, urging others to step up. "It's reparations season, and change starts in the church," he said.

[Sunday's worship](#) marked Transformation Church's first in-person service in 462 days. In a [Facebook](#) post, the church describes the event as "history in the making," with "people of all races and ethnicities [coming] together as the Capital C Church."

The post continues, "We turned a place of pain into a place of WORSHIP! And we were able to give \$1,000,000 to survivors of the Tulsa Race Massacre and non-profit organizations! When God told our founding pastor, [Bishop Gary McIntosh](#), to reverse the curse in Tulsa, we had NO idea it would be like this! But we are so GRATEFUL and HUMBLed to be used in this way!"

The Church Has Ignored the Grief of First Nation Peoples Too Long

Members of my congregation poured out their stories after the recent discoveries at Canada's residential schools. Here's why we all should be listening.

JENNIFER SINGH | JUNE 25, 2021 | CHRISTIANITY TODAY



A month ago, the remains of 215 indigenous children, some as young as 3 years old, were [uncovered](#) in British Columbia, Canada’s westernmost province. The [discovery](#) came through the persistent prayers and concerted effort of the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation who wanted to know why so many of their children never returned home from the Kamloops Indian Residential School that operated there from 1890 to 1978.

The people of Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc have known for generations that their children had likely died at the hands of those who ran the schools, Christian people charged with their care and education. Chief Rosanne Casimir [called](#) it “an unthinkable loss that was spoken about, but never documented.” In most cases, these children died without family members being informed.

These children were among the estimated 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children in Canada who were separated from their families and [forced to attend residential schools](#). From their inception in the mid 1800s to their final closure in the late 1990s, these 139 schools were “created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal [First Nation, Metis, and Inuit] children from their families in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture—the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society,” according to the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a 2015 document on the horrific legacy of residential schools.

Kamloops was a jarring reminder to many of my friends of the deep pain they have experienced.

The report gave voice to myriad forms of abuse, torture, and trauma endured by the children in these schools. To date, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has identified the names of, or information about, 4,100 children who died, and the report [outlines](#) specific calls to action related to finding and repatriating the remains of these missing children.

In the weeks since the discovery in Kamloops, I have listened to the stories of my indigenous friends, many of them residential school survivors or family members of survivors. They also belong to the church where I've served for the past two years on a First Nation in southern Alberta. All were grieved but none were shocked by the discovery. Many of them said, "Finally" or, "It's about time."

As the country expresses its communal grief through memorials marked by children's shoes and teddy bears, vigils, walks, ceremonial fires, and prayers, my First Nation friends are opening up in new ways about the trauma that has endured in their families for generations. Their stories are a call to all to listen to the voices of those, both past and present, who have lived through and continue to be impacted by the horror of residential schools.

It is absolutely incumbent on every follower of Christ to know the stories of injustice and pain that their closest neighbors continue to endure. And beyond just Christians, there is a responsibility for every person to know the story of the land they are privileged to call home.

Like the people of the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, my friends have been praying for years for lost children to be found. Our 100-plus-year-old church building is located close to where the former St. Barnabas Residential School operated, and people on our Nation often say that they hear children laughing and crying when no one else is around. The community believes that these are the souls of the children who died while attending the school and were never laid to rest.

Members also experience survivors' guilt. One elder at the church told me, "When I heard the news, I was shocked that there was so many [bodies found] and that they were so young. ... I was only four years old when I went in, but I came home ... and they didn't. I feel very sad for the parents who died without ever knowing what happened to their children."

Some have been painfully reminded of the abuse that their parents went through in residential school. One friend recounted stories of her father being forced to kneel on an iron rod for hours, staring at a picture of Jesus, as punishment. After years of being "disciplined" in this way, her father's knees become deformed and were a source of deep shame to him. He never wore shorts.

Her mother was also subjected to horrific practices, including white powder—DDT—being ground into her skull. Even after the pesticide was banned, it was still used in residential schools. Her prolonged exposure resulted in osteoarthritis, and the harmful impacts of that were passed to her children.

Most of my friends speak of the emotional impacts of these schools not only on survivors, but also on subsequent generations. This friend recalls that it was not until her parents completed a trauma

program that they were able to show emotion at all. She remembers thinking as a child, “What is wrong with me? Why can’t I hug my dad and mom properly?”

Another friend described her parents as “lost” and similarly noticed that they wouldn’t hug their children or say, “I love you.”

She remembers the day that her grinding hunger was enough for her to succumb to the plea of the nuns: “Come to the House of the Lord, and we will take care of you.” She had always been afraid of the church because of her parents’ and grandparents’ stories, but she believed the nuns would help her and her siblings. As soon as they arrived, the nuns called Children and Family Services and split up her and her siblings for the rest of their childhood. She grew up in a system where she experienced horrific amounts of abuse and violence.

But that is not the end of her story. She now has several children and constantly says to her daughter, “I love you, my girl.” Her husband is her biggest cheerleader. Together, they are raising their children to understand, experience, and express love and affection. I have been a happy recipient of their efforts—one of their children gives me a bear hug every time he sees me.

Kamloops was a jarring reminder to many of my friends of the deep pain they have experienced. But it has also brought about a sense of vindication and hope: vindication that what many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people have been saying for generations is now known to the wider public, and hope that many more of the children lost to residential schools will be found and finally laid to rest.

The bones of these 215 children are bearing witness to the reality of Canada’s dark secret. The secret is now out and cannot be hidden ever again. In the past few weeks, [more graves have been discovered](#), including 104 children’s bodies on the Sioux Valley Dakota Nation in southern Manitoba and 751 unmarked graves near the former Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan. We know more will be uncovered.

These atrocities were committed by Christians, people who represented the church and claimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Many Christian politicians defended and rationalized the existence of these schools. And many non-indigenous people in the church today, out of ignorance or stubbornness, have yet to learn about this history. As people who profess to believe in the in-breaking kingdom of God, we must actively seek out the voices of those most marginalized if we want to be a part of God’s kingdom-bringing work on earth as it is in heaven.

For an indigenous person in Canada, the Christian church is contested space. Many of my congregants grapple with what it means to belong to a church that has perpetuated cultural genocide. And yet, many are still committed to it. One woman in my congregation said, “I always used to ask my granny how she could go to church after hearing some of her residential school stories. She said, ‘It wasn’t God who ran residential schools, it was people.’”

Our elder was also recently questioned on her decades long commitment to the church. She answered, “I don’t pray to church, I don’t pray to religion, I pray to God the Creator, and I need my church so that I can pray.”

The discovery in Kamloops has tested the faith of many in our small community. But several have shared that they need God, prayers, the Bible, and the church more than ever. Another elder said, “Even after going through residential school, my mother read this big Bible and taught us to always say the Lord’s Prayer, whenever we were hungry, cold, lonely, or afraid ... she always told us to say that prayer.”

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How can the devastating consequences of residential schools be overcome? The people in my congregation suggest three things: First, end the silence around residential schools among the wider Canadian public; pay attention and really listen to the stories of survivors. Second, since people are not born racist, they say, “Stop teaching people how to be racist.” In other words, work to resist and reverse the sense of inferiority and cultural genocide the First Nation people have been subjected to. Third, since 94 Calls to Action came out of the Truth and Reconciliation Report, take these actions, some of which pertain to finding the remains of missing children and advocating for equal treatment.

I do not believe it is an accident that our church right now is preaching through the Book of Acts. I have been drawn to the story in Acts 9 of Saul’s conversion. We rarely highlight the character of Ananias in this story, but this is the character my congregants identify with. And they see Saul as a representative of how the church has treated them. Though God could have healed Saul’s blindness without human help, God chose Ananias, one of Saul’s potential victims, to come near to him, to touch him, and to complete his healing.

The victim heals the perpetrator.

For too long, non-indigenous people in Canada thought First Nations peoples needed us to heal them. Maybe now, we will discover the truth that it is the other way around.

Paying attention and wholeheartedly listening, allowing these stories to really touch the hearts and lives of non-indigenous people (just as Ananias had to touch Saul), is where true healing for the victims of residential schools and healing for the church (as perpetrators) will start to happen.

Being touched requires getting close, really close, through the bonds that are formed in friendship. My prayer is that more churches across Canada will long for and appropriately pursue true and lasting friendship with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities where they can be touched by the heartbreak, resilience, and beauty of people who have endured unspeakable harm in the name of creating this country we all call home, and that these missing children will never, ever be forgotten. *Jennifer Singh is a professor at Ambrose University and lay minister of a church on a First Nation in southern Alberta.*